

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Friday, December 2, 2016



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Attorney General Announces Settlement to Improve Language Access for D.C. Department of Human Services Customers

WASHINGTON, D. C. – Attorney General Karl A. Racine announced today that the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has settled a lawsuit filed by two customers of the District’s Department of Human Services (DHS). The settlement will bolster the agency’s ability to serve customers who speak languages other than English and provides DHS with ongoing assistance in reviewing and improving its language access policies and practices.

The suit was filed in federal court by Maria Amaya Torres and Minerva Nolasco, who alleged they were denied certain DHS benefits because they had not been provided sufficient language access services by the agency.

“This settlement is good news for our city, because it enhances the Department of Human Services’ ability to serve all District residents regardless of their primary language,” Attorney General Racine said. **“Our office worked closely with DHS Director Laura Green Zeilinger and senior members of her staff, and with attorneys representing the plaintiffs, to achieve a prompt and productive settlement of this litigation.”**

The settlement includes enhancements to the DHS language access services provided to District of Columbia residents pursuant to the District’s Language Access Act of 2004. The terms of the settlement include:

- The creation of a new position of Ombudsman for all DHS service centers; the Ombudsman will be an experienced, multilingual DHS employee who will be available to personally assist DHS customers with language access issues; and
- The establishment of a new Language Access Customer Advisory Group, composed of community representatives, DHS personnel, and a representative from OAG. The group will review the success of DHS’s language access enhancements and make recommendations for any additional improvements.

“I want to thank Director Zeilinger and members of her staff as well as OAG Assistant Attorneys General William F. Causey and Fernando Amarillas for their hard work with plaintiffs’ lawyers to bring about this positive settlement,” Attorney General Racine said.

DHS provides a wide array of services, and almost half of all District residents are DHS customers. The settlement will have a far-reaching and long-lasting positive impact on the quality of DHS services that District residents expect and should receive.

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